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THE TRUTH ABOUT BASEBALL

BY WALTER CAMP

BASEBALL is the true National Game of America. It is a game for the people, played by them and understood by them. The materials are inexpensive and the sand lot or pasture, or even the street, is a good enough field, in spite of the police, for Young America to use for his baseball. And because the youth grows up in the game it follows that when he reaches manhood's estate, and the grind of making a living becomes too great to admit of further personal achievement in the sport, these men of the country flock to the great grandstands to see baseball played by the "professional." Is it any wonder, then, that the public feels a vested interest in this game, and that they are inexpressibly shocked to discover that these players whom they had admired and in whom they had implicit confidence, have been betraying them by selling games?

The history of the sport has been checkered, and the game has gone through vicissitudes of a similar nature before. Away back in the early 'fifties it was assuming its first stage as an organized sport, growing out of indiscriminate play with bat and ball. Still, it was a local game with local rules. There were sporadic outbursts of it in colleges, but no schedules, and there were no professional nines. In the 'sixties it had developed into a semblance of organization, and there were some professional or semi-professional nines; but there were no men who played for a living, because they could not make money enough to last them through the winter. But as the game grew in popular favor, it became possible to make money out of it, and men did not hesitate to exploit such possibilities. Soon betting and pool selling began to have an inevitable effect. Sold games became a common thing and many of the journals of the time predicted its speedy downfall. Then in 1867 a great convention was held in Philadelphia in the hope of reinstating baseball in popular favor

and confidence. Five hundred clubs were represented. Some good was accomplished, but it was not until nine years later that the National League of eight clubs was formed, and to this may be attributed the real rise into confidence of the professional side of the game. In 1881 the American Association was organized and, soon after, the National Agreement united the two in respectful and harmonious tolerance, and established the sport in good repute with the interested public.

The present scandal in the baseball world began when the result of the World Series games of 1919 became known, and it caused great surprise in the public mind. This surprise was colored by various rumors which aroused suspicion, and finally culminated in a sworn confession by Claude Williams that he had received \$10,000 to help "throw" the series, of which he gave Jackson \$5000. He said that arrangements to accomplish this betrayal were made in a conference between himself, Jackson, Weaver, Risberg, Felsch, Gandil, Cicotte and McMullin, and two gamblers, named Brown and Sullivan. This meeting was held in a South Side hotel in Chicago previous to the series. Upon this information the Grand Jury indicted, and the trial is on at the present time. The defense now asks a bill of particulars along the following lines: What control had the White Sox owners over players after expiration of the regular playing season September 28, 1919? When and where the conspiracy occurred to destroy the business of the White Sox Club? What bribe was offered, and given by whom and to whom and how and why? When and where and how the players failed to execute their plays with their best skill and in what particular plays they failed? And finally how the games alleged to have been "thrown" could have been won by these players?

It will be seen that there may be some difficulties in proving all this in court. But so far as the public is concerned, the game of Baseball has been called before the bar of the people and already convicted of a laxity of morals which has shaken the people's confidence. Whether all the indicted players are acquitted or convicted in a court of law, is not a matter of moment except as a deterrent to future players. As a matter of fact, the trial will probably have for its effect the arousing of still further sus-

picion on the part of the public, rather than the allaying of their fears and anxiety. There is a story that a small boy, an embryo "sand lot's player," was, shortly after the scandal, found out in the yard breaking his bat into kindling wood and crying silently. This, perhaps better than anything else, describes the attitude of the "fans" of the country when this disclosure burst upon them. They felt that the props of a pleasure that they had enjoyed with a supreme confidence in the integrity of the game, had been suddenly knocked out from the foundations, and their depression was great. But gradually that confidence was partially restored during the season following, and if it were not for the coming trial, a large proportion of the followers of the game would have been unable to remember in another year even the names of all the indicted players, and affairs would have been running once more almost as smoothly as before.

Forty-four years ago, four men—Nichols, Craver, Hall and Devlin—were expelled from the Louisville Baseball Club for crooked work in selling games. So strong was the evidence against these men, that when confronted with it, two of them confessed and implicated the other two. All four were then summoned before the Directors of the Club, and all but one of them signed orders on the telegraph company for copies of telegrams alleged to have passed between them and the gamblers. The one who did not sign this order, Graver, was immediately expelled. The copies of the dispatches proved conclusively the guilt of all, and the other three were dismissed in disgrace from professional baseball and were never reinstated, although many appeals in various forms were presented, backed by petitions and sometimes accompanied by threats.

In 1911, three men were arrested by the police in San Francisco, charged with gambling on the grounds of a local club. The prosecution failed to make out a case, but Judge Weller, in releasing them, said, "I am dismissing these men because there is no proof here that they were gambling on the result of that game. But I will do all that is within the power of this Court to keep the game of baseball free from the stain of gambling. If the officers will bring to me men who have been caught 'red-handed' at this thing, I will see that they are properly attended to."

In reviewing the early days of baseball, Mr. A. G. Spalding says, "Another class to be dealt with was the gambling element, and this opposition (to properly organized control) was not to be lightly considered. They had so long been the controlling influence that anything threatening their ascendancy was sure to meet with resistance."

Even in the early days of the National League, they forbade pool making or liquor selling on any League Ball Grounds. Furthermore, they provided that players were subject to expulsion for being interested in any side bet or for purchasing pools on any game.

Many years ago, when horse racing had begun to decline, and when the betting and gambling fraternity seemed to have secured a firm hold upon all sporting events, a prominent periodical published an article consigning baseball to the ranks of a rowdyism characteristic of the race-track and concluded with these words, "Meantime one sport has been steadily gaining ground and promises to become the true and National Sport of America: Croquet!" It seems astounding to think now that such a statement was made in good faith, and that the writer of it really believed that the tame sport of croquet would be the great survivor. And yet, for a time, croquet did have a remarkable vogue. Incidentally, there is evidence that at the time this game extended throughout every city and village in the country, there were more cheating and bitter quarrels than had ever racked families or friends in the history of any game. Even the most straitlaced and precise of our forebears seemed not to be above a gentle moving of the ball with the foot when no one was looking, and many a lawn saw the beginnings of quarrels that sundered relatives and even disrupted church entertainments.

Before taking up the possibility of cleaning up the evil of baseball, it is well worth while to show a phase of its professional aspect that has entirely escaped the attention of the thousands who follow this sport. Baseball differs and must always differ from amateur sport in its ethics. These players are paid players, their salaries depend upon the quality of their play, and their ability to win in a contest of skill. It is their livelihood. The source from which these salaries come is the pocket of the spec-

tator, the man who pays his money at the gate. Some of these spectators come simply to see the skill of the player; but by far the larger part come for the excitement of the competition between skilled players all striving to excel in a team game, and any particular contest gives satisfaction to the greatest number of those in the stands when the home team wins. Now this leads us directly to the point. These players are not born and raised in the town whose name they bear. They are hired to play under that uniform, and there are constant annual shifts of players. Hence the public must believe in the good faith of each player—his loyalty to his uniform. The player must at least seem to *want* to win. Most of those familiar personally with the professional players are confident of their honesty of purpose and their single-heartedness in the struggle to win. The great bulk of the profession is conscientious, loves the game, and plays to win at all times. This should be remembered when any judgment is passed upon professional baseball. It is the suspicion that players were not so actuated that made the selling of a single series such a serious menace to the game of professional baseball in its entirety.

And just a word as to why this exhibition of skilled and salaried players on the baseball field differs from a theatrical entertainment or a "movie" show or any other similar form of amusement for which the public pays the box office price: These other entertainments by skilled professionals may possibly, in isolated cases, arouse a desire on the part of the spectator to imitate the performer, to become one of these professionals. But the number affected in this way is so insignificant as to be almost negligible, whereas in the case of baseball, the exhibition of the skilled professional is always encouraging almost every small boy to play ball, to get out of doors and indulge in the sport. This goes on up through our schools and colleges and athletic clubs, so that we do have an exceedingly strong reason for the continuance of these public exhibitions of skill beside that of the amusement and entertainment provided for the spectators. And in this, after all, lies the greatest reason for encouraging the game, and therefore for allaying the suspicions that have recently surrounded it.

In many States there are laws on the statute books that are dead letters, never enforced and practically forgotten, simply because they do not accord with public sentiment. So in this present baseball upheaval, not the constitutions of the Leagues, nor agreements among the owners, nor even the employing at an extraordinary salary of Judge Landis, will prevent similar cases of crooked dealing unless the baseball public uses the only means at its command to enforce integrity. It is upon the gate receipts that all this structure depends, and upon which it must stand or fall. A restored confidence will swell these receipts, and the game will prosper.

The various laws proposed, and in some instances already enacted, will help; a conviction of indicted players may help if it does not make martyrs of them with a certain class, or if in the progress of the trial, further suspicion of a more widespread character does not arise. But after all, gambling is at the root of the trouble, and unless the pasture of the gambler is rendered unproductive, he will be found cultivating his fields again, and once more he will find a crop for his grazing. He depends not upon the small wager, nor even upon small bookmaking or pool-selling, but upon the aggregation of the larger betters. The dollar or the ten dollar bet, even though there be many of them, was not the stake in the selling of that series of 1919. It was the large bets—of a thousand dollars, five thousand, ten thousand—that made it interesting for the big gamblers, the ones who make a business of it, and whose payroll, even of assistants and the expense of carrying, amounts to a huge sum annually. And a majority of these large bets come from the best and straightest sportsmen in the country. If these sportsmen the country over would for a year limit their wagers to not over ten dollars on any single sporting event, the gamblers, having to prey upon themselves, would be forced to eat one another, and that they will not do for any protracted length of time. If they were thus deprived of the big betters, there would be no longer any interest for them to “buy” players. We should have a safe situation, and the public could be assured of straight games.

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